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BAND

November 29, 2016 - December 23, 2016

Curated by Stephanie Buhmann

Pat Badt, Bettina Blohm, Marthe Keller
Julie Shapiro, Kim Uchiyama, Joan Witek

THE PAINTING CENTER

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10001

Tuesday - Saturday, 11- 6 pm, www.thepaintingcenter.org

Band

In the canon of nonobjective painting, there have been many artists to pursue purity of form through geometry, employing line as a predominant visual element. Agnes Martin, whose retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, will coincide with this exhibition (October 7, 2016 - January 11, 2017), is one who immediately comes to mind. According to Martin, it was Mark Rothko, who had “reached zero” in his luminous compositions “so that nothing could stand in the way of truth.” Following his footsteps, she began to exclusively focus on reductive elements, searching for a classic perception of perfection, one that could be linked to antiquity. While she admitted that one cannot “make a perfect painting,” she stressed that “we can see perfection in our minds.” To her, perfection could emphasize a sense of transcendence and from 1960 onward she pursued it vigorously in a signature style rooted in lines and grids.

More than half a century later, Martin’s ambitions still resonate. Many contemporary abstract artists continue to explore the simple structures and rhythms that lines can create when working against a grid, be they vertical, horizontal, diagonal or loops; they believe in the expressive range that can be achieved. Among them are Pat Badt, Bettina Blohm, Marthe Keller, Julie Shapiro, Kim Uchiyama and Joan Witek, six mid-career East Coast painters. While the works of these six artists vary significantly in stylistic approaches, they also have much in common. Above all, they share a concentrated devotion to the repetition of line as a predominant compositional feature. These lines might manifest as broad strokes and thick bands or be fine and precise; they might be rough, slick, straight, wavering, or translate as a seemingly endless loop. In all cases, they are employed to capture and distill meaning, experience, emotion, and gathered information.

Pat Badt’s work springs from specific experiences, some of them as mundane as eating a meal, flying, or delivering a talk at a conference. In her work, she isolates colors that represent these experiences, yet without aiming for a literal context. Instead, the association might be loose or only apparent to her. Impacted by the work of Joan Mitchell, Joan Snyder and Richard Diebenkorn, among others, she has worked in abstraction since the early 1970’s. “I work with a woven matrix of string that demands that I am always on the surface of the painting,” she states. In her paintings, gesture is restricted. Here, actual vertical strings are lines of color built up to accumulate in multiple layers. Her compositions can evoke geological formations and are dense in information that has been processed over time. Badt’s work translates as a record of a personal history; all incorporated sources come from specific events and are often listed and specified on the back of each painting.

Bettina Blohm has been refining her abstract paintings for nearly thirty years. Her visual language is inspired by the dense color palettes of Matisse, the scale and breadth of the Abstract Expressionists, and the poetic lack of naturalism of Asian landscape paintings. Each painting is focused on a single color, shifting with brushwork, thickness, hatches and lines to create intermediate spaces. Blohm’s works take many months to create. She builds layer upon layers of paint, washes off entire sections, and repaints to create a gestural and urgent surface holding a sense of emotional intensity underneath. She states, “through this process the paintings acquire their own history, like fictional characters. I think of the result as something parallel to nature.”

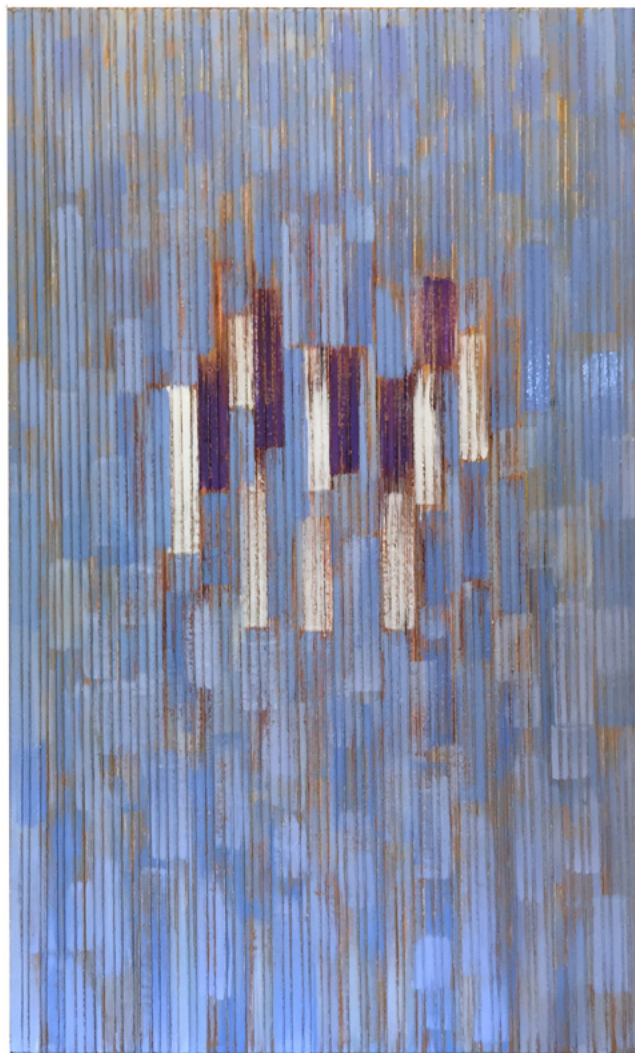
Marthe Keller avoids nature-based color. In fact, in the early 1990's she switched from oil to acrylic paint to take advantage of the newer medium's colors derived from the automotive and military industries, free of natural and art historical connotations. "I wanted to make paintings out of my own urban life, not art history," she explains, adding that in general she prefers "non-beautiful, decayed and overly irritating color." Inspired by John Cage's chance approach to life and art, Keller embraces a palette inspired by occasional discoveries of everyday objects, such as industrial plastic chairs. To her, "chance is a beautiful way of affirming life without imposing too much ego." Having worked in abstraction since the late 1960s, she draws inspiration from multiple sources: "Everything alive is repetitive, and everything repetitive inspires me...[such as] the structure of Finnegans Wake [which is] endless and recursive and musical with sound repetition and rhythm.

Julie Shapiro's palette is sparked by natural objects, the atmosphere, and her relationship to the experience of a "place, a day, a certain kind of light, the sound of something." At other times, her choice of color is a response to what is already set up in a composition, meant to amplify the emerging proposition. Meanwhile, much of Shapiro's practice is rooted in intuition; she employs perception, observation, and experience to a process that embraces an intuitive search for color, line and space. While her work is largely inspired by the landscape that surrounds her, other sources of information and collected experiences filter in. They all shape her decisions in regard to subtle shifts in the scale of compositional elements, surface organization, and the emphasis on space. For decades, Shapiro has worked consistently in painting, drawing and printmaking. Lately, collage has also taken an integral role both

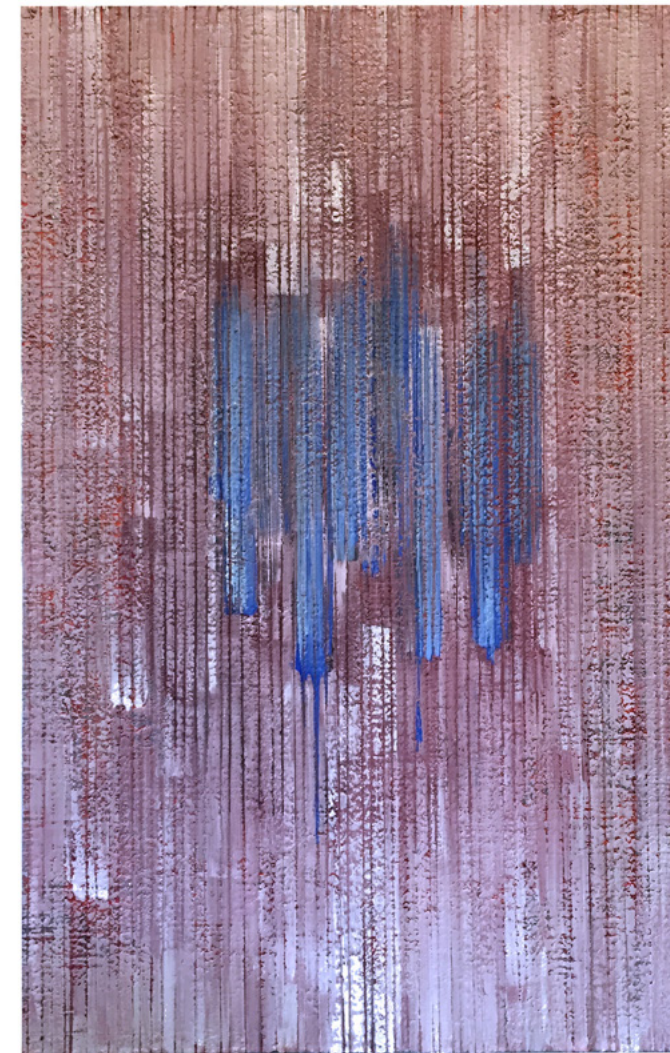
conceptually and methodologically. Reflecting on this, she states: "The interplay between media continues to expand and challenge my work."

Kim Uchiyama's color also derives from nature. Composed of lushly painted horizontal bands, she works within a format that is derived from landscape, in particular the layering of earth and sky. The weight of one color placed against another creates a balanced dialogue that structures her overall composition. These paintings capture an enigmatic, elusive light while stacked bands of color imply not one but many open horizons.

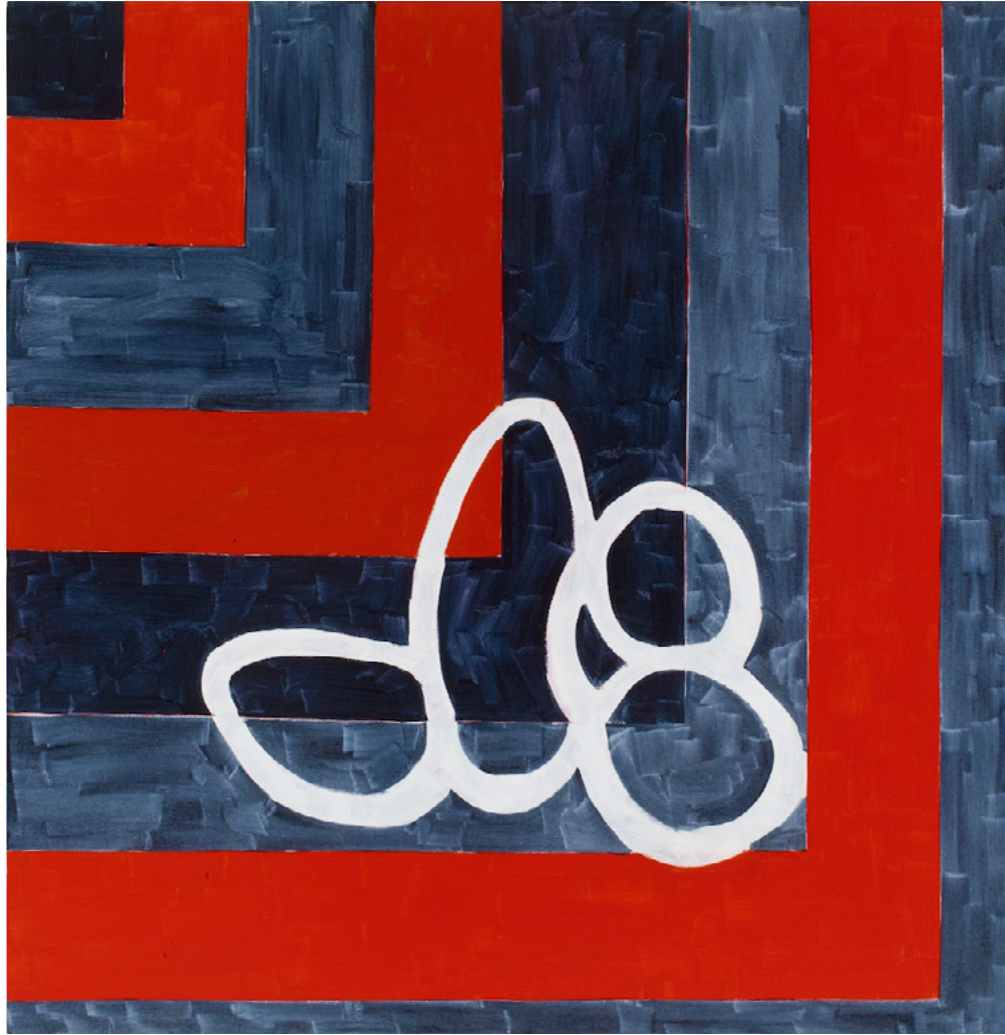
Joan Witek has continuously worked in black and white since the 1970's, exploring an abstract language rooted in fine proportions and stark contrasts. She uses fine pencil lines on white ground to define her compositions, before applying black oilstick to establish rich strokes. The latter move vertically, horizontally, or diagonally on the picture plane, employing the invisible grid as the overall structural backbone. Though seemingly graphic when viewed from afar, Witek embraces handmade imperfections that offer rich nuance. In fact, subtle expression is found within each line as thickness and strength of application shifts. It is in these variations within the overall minimal vocabulary that we find traces of emotional undercurrents and a glimpse of the person behind the work.



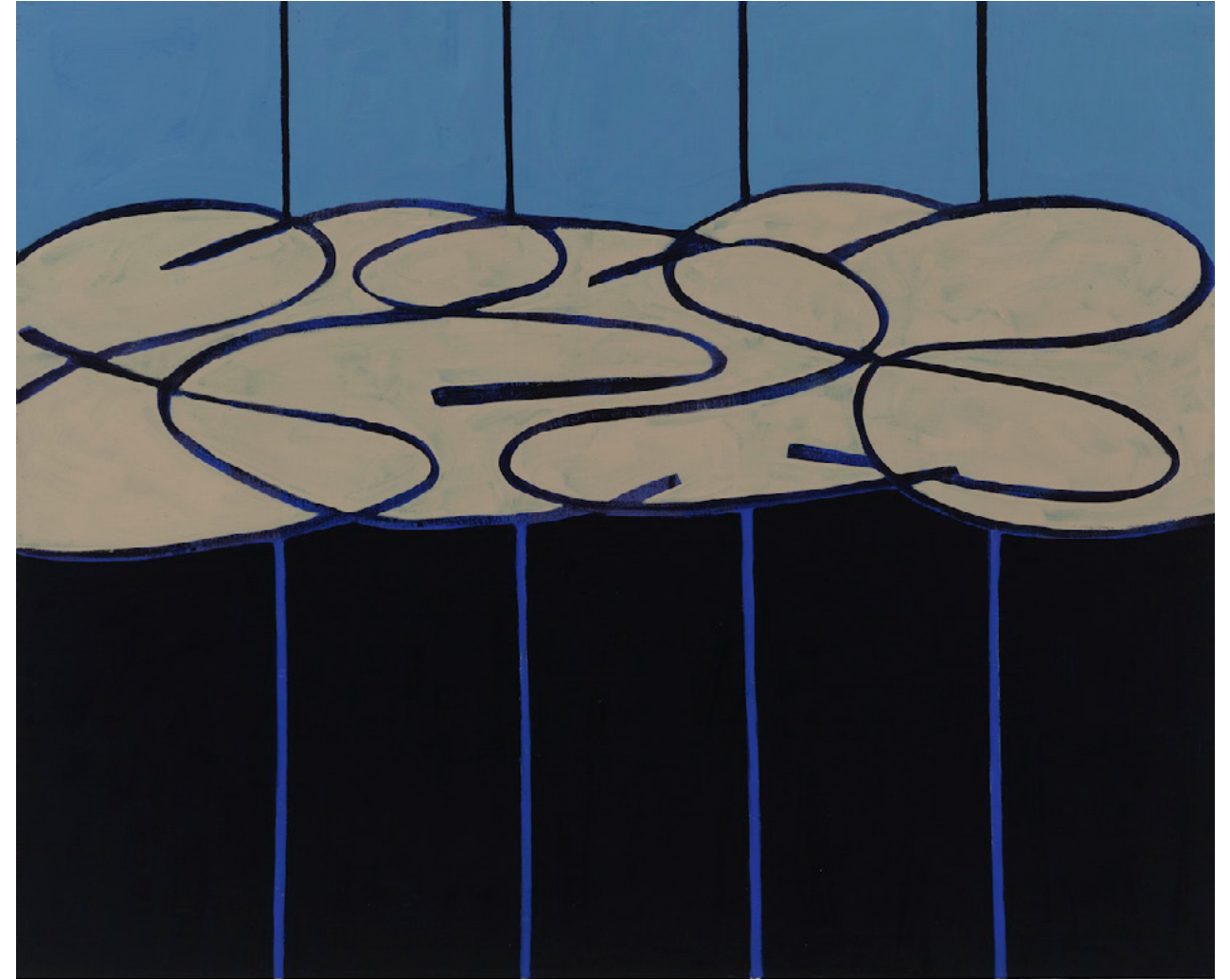
Pat Badt, *Waiting for Purple Martins to arrive*, 2016, Oil on panel, 58.5" x 34"



Pat Badt, *Summer Rain*, 2016, Oil on canvas mounted on alumalite, 48" x 38"



Bettina Blohm, *Souvenirs*, 2015, Oil on linen, 40" x 40"



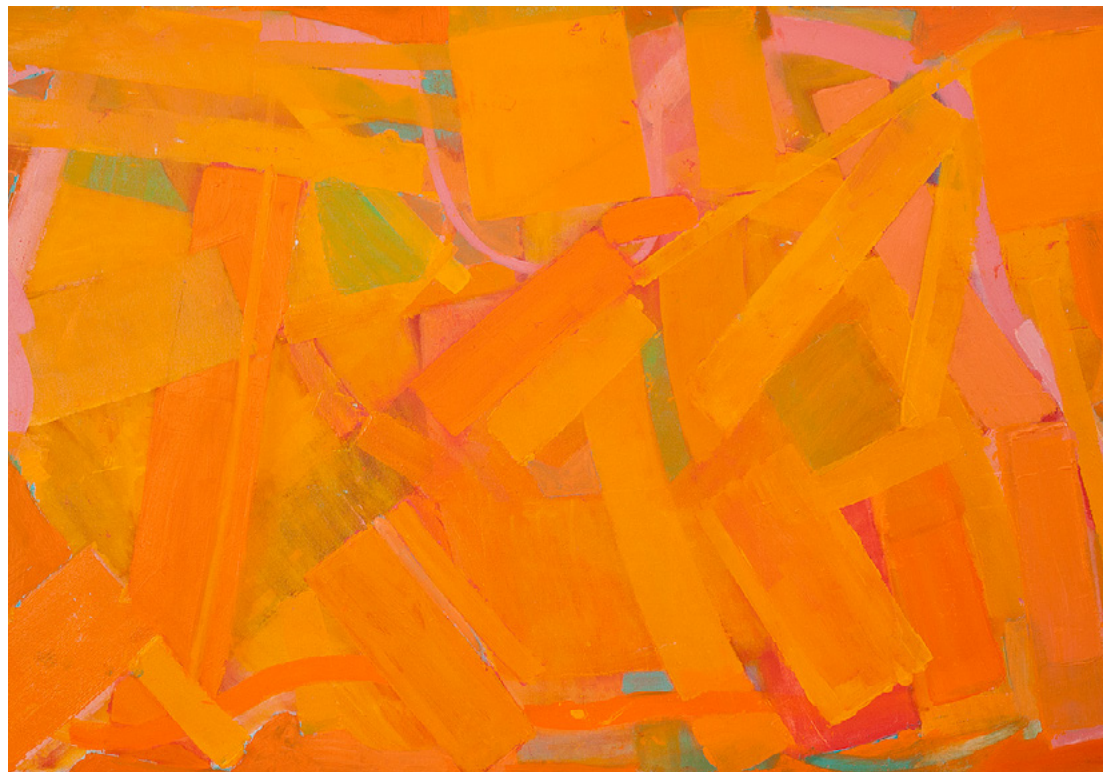
Bettina Blohm, *Weather*, 2013, Oil on linen, 34" x 42"



Marthe Keller, *Italian marching band*, 2015, Acrylic, zinc, dust on treated canvas on panel, 38" x 40"



Marthe Keller, *Polygluttral*, 2007, Acrylic on linen, 59" x 58"



Julie Shapiro, *Horizontal Twist*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 29" x 48"



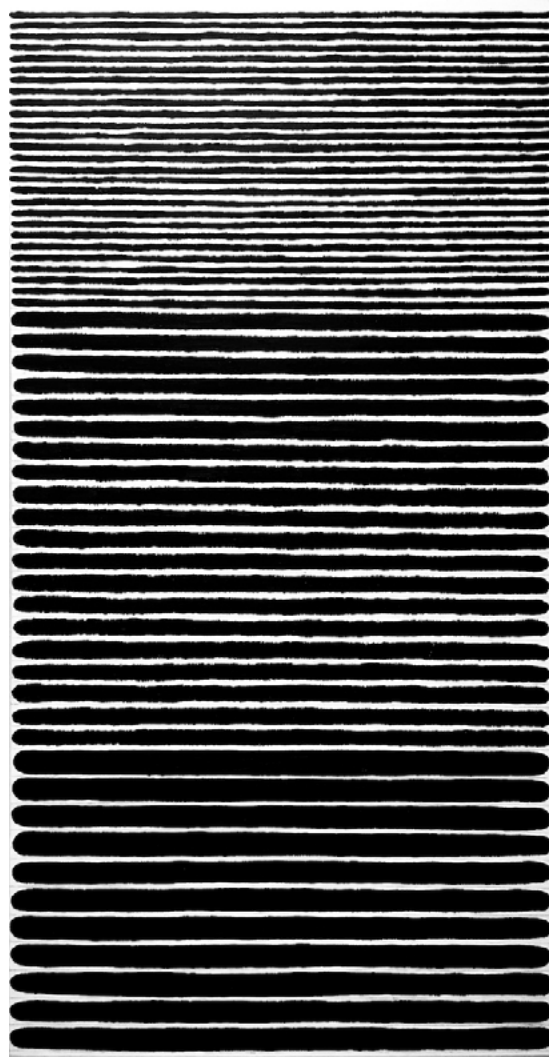
Julie Shapiro, *Tinge*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 36" x 28"



Kim Uchiyama, *Light Study #43*, 2016, Oil on linen, 43" x 34"



Kim Uchiyama, *Light Study #50*, 2016, Oil on linen, 57" x 40"



Joan Witek, *P-166*, 2011, Oil stick on canvas, 48" x 24"



Joan Witek, *P-131*, 2011, Oil stick on canvas, 24" x 24"

